



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

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Department of Health announces measles infection identified in O'ahu international traveler

HONOLULU, HI – The Department of Health (DOH) is investigating a case of confirmed measles in an unvaccinated O'ahu resident returning from international travel. DOH has been able to identify those with known exposure to the case and is working with them to prevent spread of disease. In a Medical Advisory issued today, the DOH also asks healthcare providers to be on the alert for possible cases of measles. Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease.

Staying up-to-date on routine childhood vaccines, including the measles vaccine (usually first given at the one-year well-child visit as the MMR combination vaccine against measles, mumps, and rubella), protects our keiki and the larger community from outbreaks of measles.

MMR coverage rates have dropped among children globally and nationally since pre-pandemic years. While Hawai'i has not experienced any recent outbreaks or spread of measles within the state, this case is a reminder that measles can be identified in Hawai'i when residents or travelers are exposed overseas and re-enter the state.

“The pandemic caused setbacks for childhood immunization programs worldwide,” said State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble. “As a result, we are seeing increases in outbreaks globally, and sometimes outbreaks in the United States as well. We are very fortunate to have a safe and highly effective vaccine against measles. This is a reminder to check your child's immunization status and make sure they are up-to-date on all recommended shots.”

Measles is a very contagious disease caused by a virus. It spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Measles starts with fever, followed by cough, runny nose, and red eyes. Then a rash of tiny, red spots breaks out. It starts at the head and spreads to the rest of the body.

Measles can cause serious health complications, especially in children under five years of age and in infants under one year old, who are too young to be vaccinated against measles. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one out of every 20 children with measles gets pneumonia, and one out of 1000 develops encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Nearly one to three out of 1,000 children who become infected with measles will die from respiratory and neurologic complications.

“All eligible keiki should be vaccinated against measles,” urged Dr. Kenneth Fink, Director of Health. “Prevention is easy. Don’t miss an opportunity to protect your child against this serious disease.”

More information about measles is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html>.

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